

Lesson #1

The cram school teacher said, "It's okay if you don't get 100%. 70% is good enough."

If I were God, I would put youth at the end of a human's lifespan. (A. Franz)

If I were God, I would add chocolate popsicles to the school cafeteria's menu. (Sakata Ginpachi)

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Gintama High School.

Although it seems strange, it is in fact the name of the school, so what can you do? Besides, somewhere in the world there's got to be a school that's weirder than this one...probably.

Year 3, class Z.

This "Z" is not read as "Zetto", but rather as "Zui~". Why? "Because it sounds cooler that way." It's not known if it was the founders of the school or the principal who said this. Actually, it's not clear whether this was ever said at all. But even if there's no hard evidence, the "Z" is read this way. "Are there really that many students in the school?" If someone asks this question, just respond with, "The person in charge isn't here right now, so I can't respond."

Here's the classroom.

This isn't a particularly strange place. There are sliding doors at the front and back of the room, a podium, and a bunch of desks and chairs for the students, all normal stuff. Just imagine it as one of those classrooms you see in TV dramas and it'll be okay. However, if you really want to find something strange, then at the front wall of the room, above the blackboard, there hangs a horizontal scroll. Although it can't be considered beautiful, it is with bold, confident strokes that the two characters "sugar level" are written. Why "sugar level"? If asked again, then just say, "Because the homeroom teacher has a sweet tooth, aha ha". This kind of cute reply should suffice. By the way, the back wall also has a scroll that says "sugar level". If asked about it, please use the same response as to the one in front.

In short, compared to a so-called "normal school", the difference is a world¹ away.

In 3-Z's classroom, the second desk in the front row, counting from the side near the hallway, is Shimura Shinpachi's seat.

¹Written with the character for "ball/sphere"... so, yes, the difference is a testicle away.

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It's 8:40 in the morning. Classes will begin in about five minutes. Shinpachi is sitting at his desk, one hand on his cheek, silently looking at the other students. Most of the students had left their own seats, and were chattering away loudly. A classroom without a teacher belongs to the students, so it's also natural that they would be noisy...

But our class... Shinpachi thought. Doesn't it have a few too many weirdos?

For example, to Shinpachi's left, separated by one row, that seat--

"Hey, you! What the hell-- Why did you eat my little Octopus-sama wiener? You bastard!"

The foreign exchange student from China, Kagura-chan, is already angry this early in the morning. Although she looks like a cute girl, right now she's transformed into a barbarian from the wilderness. It looks like it's already lunch break for her, and a classmate has eaten one of her wieners.

But, Kagura... Shinpachi stares blankly at her. Isn't it way too early to start eating lunch now? Also, it's not even "Octopus-san", but "Octopus-sama"? That kind of name is too confusing!

Shimura Shinpachi, he's the straight man. Though it may seem like a hasty conclusion, in this environment, considering the eccentricity of his classmates, even if he didn't want to he would become the straight man. This is Shinpachi's sad position.

"It's only a little wiener. 'Wah! Wah!' You're so noisy. In my country, there's a saying that goes, 'Octopus-san wieners belong to everyone, so don't sign your name on them!'"

This is also an exchange student. Catherine refutes Kagura's accusations in this way. She has an amazingly stern and intense face, with heavy eyebrows and thick lips. It's unknown why she has a pair of cat ears. If she's rough-looking, then she's rough-looking.

"Don't give me that kind of meaningless saying! I can make one up, too. Where I come from, there's a saying that goes, 'Cat-eared girls must be executed. Yellow is a good color, yo!' Also, it's not 'Octopus-san'. It's 'Octopus-sama!'" Kagura-chan barked back at her.

What is this persevering intensity over the octopus? It's not right. They should be focusing on the wiener...which is also unimportant.

Then, while Kagura-chan and Catherine were having their international dispute, the disciplinary committee member Okita Sougo approached from the left and sat behind them, talking to his fellow disciplinary committee member, Hijikata Toshirou.

Under the clean, chestnut colored hair are a pair of big, round eyes. He's always wearing a blank façade. Compared to Okita-kun, who looks relaxed and innocent, Hijikata-kun has messy hair and sharp eyes. These two students look like could get really good grades, but since they're in class 3-Z, they can only produce dialogue at this level.

"Hey, Sougo." Hijikata, arms crossed over his chest, called out in his deep voice.

"What is it, Hijikata-san," Okita replied softly. His legs are on top of the desk, and he's playing with his cell phone.

Then Hijikata said, "Sougo. Have you heard of mayonnaise rice?"

"Isn't it that thing where you put mayonnaise on rice?"

"Shut up! It was a rhetorical question! Anyway, not a day goes by where I don't eat that."

"Yeah, yeah, I know. So what? What about the mayonnaise rice?" While saying that, Okita-kun never stopped playing with the cell phone.

Hijikata quirked his lips up in a smirk, then continued on. "Actually, last night I finally succeeded in improving mayonnaise rice!"

"Nobody asked you to do that," Okita monotoned.

"All right, just listen. I added something to the mayonnaise rice, and then it became very, very delicious. What was it? Do you want to know?"

"Ah, return text message. --Yeah, I really want to know."

"It looks like you're not interested at all, bastard! --Hmph! Whatever, I'll tell you anyway."

"That 'something' was..." Hijikata suddenly paused, as if trying to build suspense, then he continued, "...a can of tuna...'s oil."

Shinpachi, who had been listening in on their conversation all along, can't help but to shut his eyes. H-how can that be... But what is that? A can of tuna...'s oil? Deep inside, he thought that whatever it was, it didn't matter.

"Not the tuna from a can of tuna. It's the oil from a can of tuna. I added this to the mayonnaise rice."

So, why was there a pause between "a can of tuna" and "its oil"? Why.

"You're wearing your indifferent 'it has nothing to do with me' face, Sougo." Hijikata unhappily narrowed his eyes into two small cracks.

"It's not like that at all. Next time I'm possessed by a demon, I'll go try it out."

"You have the worst social skills ever." After Hijikata-kun said this, he moved his line of sight to Okita-kun's hand. "Anyway, Sougo. Who have you been texting all this time?"

"Ah, this? This is an online dating site. Actually, only idiots are into this, so it's natural that I don't really know what I'm doing. It's only because we have time to waste that I'm playing around here."

"So that's how it is. But there's still one thing I don't get. That, isn't that my cell phone?"

"Yeah. Because it's a dating site. You can't use your own cell phone for this type of thing."

"So that's how it is. It makes a lot of sense. --You are so dead!"

Hijikata-kun suddenly stood up and walked around the desk to viciously wrap his arm around Okita-kun's neck.

It's pointless... Shinpachi, who's always seeing people fight, can't help but think so. It's completely pointless. As he was thinking this, the back door was violently shoved open.

"Otae-san!"

The idiot shouting with his loud idiot voice is Kondo Isao, who looks like a gorilla. He has an appearance which completely lacks elegance, but he's actually rather popular. Both Okita-kun and Hijikata-kun are willing to follow him, as he is the chairman of the disciplinary committee.

Upon entering the classroom, Kondo-kun ran straight toward Shimura Tae's seat. By the way, this Shimura Tae is, like her surname implies, Shinpachi's older sister.

"Aaaaah--! Otae-san, you're beautiful today as well. Even the plain uniform looks like a skirt made of pure gold when you wear it, ahahaha."

Kondo-kun loudly spoke these flattering words which he thinks would get full points. However, Otae is looking at a fashion magazine ("Introduction to killer techniques! How to pickpocket dirty old men.") as she gives her cold reply.

"So early in the morning and you're already confused, Kondo-kun. And, I've already said this many times. Could you drop the 'Otae-san'? Here, we're third years in high school."

No, "here"...? Shinpachi couldn't help but cover his face with his hands. Sis, please don't blurt out the kind of speech that exposes our backgrounds. Although we know there will be a lot of problems, it'll gradually sink in that this is Gintama High School class 3-Z.

"Ah, sorry, sorry. It seems like I'm still in the habit of thinking like our origins in 'Gintama'. Ahahaha."

...Hey, why are you speaking like that, too?! A word like "origins" you don't need to say out loud!

Disregarding Shinpachi, who was holding his head, Kondo continued his conversation with Otae.

"Well, for a high school student, calling someone 'Otae-san' is a bit much. Then what should I do? Can I call you 'TaeTae'?"

"Don't joke. Do you want me to kill you?" Otae kept reading the magazine. Her head didn't even lift as she replied.

"No? Then how about 'Tae-chan'?"

"Sounds like the name of an energy drink. Do you want me to kill you?"

"This also doesn't suit your feel. How about I call you 'Taeko' then?"

"When Doomsday arrives. Do you want me to kill you?"

"That won't do. I'll call you 'My Sweet Tae, Tae Honey'..."

Otae finally reached her limit.

Standing up with a roar, Otae mercilessly beats Kondo-kun's face with the magazine. The reason why it's making cracking sounds rather than slapping sounds is because Otae is using the hard edges of the magazine to carry out her beating.

"Waaah--! It hurts! The edge! Otae-san! The edge! You're killing me! Paper can also be a weapon! Aaah!!"

The wailing Kondo-kun had only been in the classroom for three minutes, and he had already become a human sacrifice.

But, how do you say, Shinpachi didn't have the time to sympathize with him. Otae and Kondo-kun are like this all the time. It's become a routine they do every morning.

Although it seems impossible, class Z also has some people who are always off in their own peaceful world. For example, the boy who sits in front of Kagura, Katsura Kotaro. Right now, he's sitting alone at his desk, writing something. Because he was a bit curious, Shinpachi went ahead and asked about it.

"Hey, Katsura-kun. What are you writing?"

Katsura-kun raised his head to look at Shinpachi. "This?" He lifted up the notebook so that Shinpachi could see, too.

In the notebook was an unusually realistic drawing of a...mystery animal.

It was an animal that could only be called a mystery. It looked kind of like a penguin monster. More specifically, it had a penguin's body and a duck's head. Its appearance defies biology.

"Did you know? This is my pet, Elizabeth," Katsura-kun said.

"I know..."

He knows, but he can't understand it at all. Why is it necessary to draw it now? And also, to draw it so much like a duck. Ah! Just now, Katsura-kun gave a tiny smile. Why is he smiling?

Shinpachi returned Katsura-kun's smile with a dry smile of his own, then shifted his attention away. There was no telling what Katsura-kun was trying to do. It was really too dangerous to keep investigating.

To the left of Katsura-kun and one row apart, Hasegawa Taizo is seriously looking through the employment section of a newspaper. The reason why Hasegawa-kun, who wears sunglasses and has a beard, looks so much like an old man is because he actually is an old man.

"So, besides the graveyard shift, there are no jobs with wages over 1000 yen, huh." His muttering could still be faintly heard.

Aaah, Hasegawa-kun. Although it's obviously not good to witness bloody incidents this early

in the morning, there's also something wrong with your sad face.

A student in the last seat of Hasegawa-kun's row is silently absorbed in his knitting. This is not a situation where one can say, "Ha! He's already working so earnestly this early in the morning!"

This student's name is Hedoro. To put it bluntly, he's extremely frightening. His face is so fierce that people are bound to think of the Buddhist sculptures of the Kamakura period² when they see it-- Speaking of which, he's also disturbingly tall, so basically he looks like a monster. Hair like a lion's mane covers all sides of his head; on either side of his head are curving horns like a water buffalo. But he's knitting so earnestly and exquisitely that he's definitely going to be the winner of this year's Girls' Crafts Competition. However, we still have to discuss Hedoro-kun's reputation. This person is extremely gentle. Not only does he love flowers, plants, and animals, but he never argues with others. Ah...just now, he made eye contact. ...That...So sorry, but that was still really scary...

So, uh, in this way, class 3-Z can also be considered a treasure trove of characters. Besides those who were just introduced, there are a lot of other intense personalities. Really, as soon as you get here, there's the feeling that this is less of a place to study and more of an amusement park.

Hopefully, today will pass by without any major incidents... Thinking in this way, Shinpachi slowly adjusted his glasses.

Kagura-chan's voice boomed throughout the class.

"Ah! You damn cat ears! Now you've stolen one of my fried meatballs--!"

"I've only eaten one fried meatball. Wah, wah, you're going to scream us to death!"

Whoa! Why are you two still shouting?!

As Shinpachi was complaining, Kagura-chan lifted her right hand and swung her fist. She was probably aiming at Catherine, but Kagura-chan missed by a wide margin and unfortunately ended up hitting Katsura-kun in the back of the head.

"-----!"

Katsura-kun couldn't even let out a sound. He immediately flopped onto the table, a wisp of smoke rising from the place where he was hit.

Then it was Otae roaring again.

"Listen up! Get the hell away from my seat nowwww---!"

Otae and Kondo-kun's pattern continued on.

After that scream, Otae suddenly chucked her fashion magazine. Of course, her target was Kondo-kun's face.

²The Kamakura period (1185-1333) was when Buddhism became hugely popular in Japan. The sculptures that are being referred to are the kongorikishi statues depicting the muscular and wrathful guardians of Buddha. (They look like demons.)

"Aaah--!"

Kondo-kun quickly dodged, and the result was that the fashion magazine with more killing power than a Kienzan³ smashed directly into the back of Hasegawa-kun's head.

"Really, this is only temporary...bwargh!"

Hasegawa-kun immediately flopped onto the table, a pool of blood spreading out on the employment section of his newspaper.

Then there's also...

"You bastard! Did you post on a suicide website again?!"

"Aaah, Hijikata-san, didn't you say it before? That you have a strong desire to see what was on the other side?"

"There's no way I would have said something like that! What desire?!"

Hijikata-kun chased after Okita-kun, who was running away.

It's no good, Shinpachi thought. A peaceful day-- That kind of wish will never come true in class 3-Z.

With this group of idiots, the problem isn't that the class is out of control, but that the class is going through a total meltdown...! Shinpachi whispered fearfully in his heart.

The front door of the classroom pulled open with a click.

A man appeared. A man with glasses, white clothes, tie sloppily hanging around his neck, and white, naturally permed hair. This man spoke around the cigarette in his mouth.

"Already so loud this early in the morning. You bastards must think you're still innocent little middle school brats, huh."

This man is class 3-Z's homeroom teacher, Sakata Ginpachi.

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This is, how do you say, ah, a very rebellious teacher, this Sakata Ginpachi.

Whether it's in the classroom or anywhere else, at all times and places, he always has a cigarette in his mouth. Even more puzzling is the fact that he doesn't look like a teacher at all. He's always staring ahead with those dead fish eyes.

³The *Kienzan* is one of Krillin's attacks in Dragonball, also known as the "Energy Circle Razor" or "Destructo Disc".

"Also, you bastards have already used up nineteen pages before I even showed up! I was starting to lose my patience with waiting!"

This kind of random dialogue makes it completely impossible for people to imagine him as a character in a novel.

Perhaps he could be described as rough, or having a distinctive style, or the PTA has zero faith in him. In short, he's a serious deviation from the image of a model teacher.

However, it's also undeniable that this person has a certain magnetism about him.

Ginpachi just appeared in the classroom, and the students who were a screaming chaotic mess just a while ago are now all sitting in their own seats, facing him.

Ginpachi smacked the attendance book onto the podium and spoke with the same bored tone he always used.

"Hn. Then...we'll start class for today-- Who's the student on duty?"

Hearing these words, Shinpachi suddenly remembered that it was his turn to be the student on duty.⁴

"Ah, yes. Stand--"

Just as Shinpachi was about to give the command, Ginpachi interrupted him.

"Aaaah, wait a sec. Starting from today, the commands will be 'stand up', 'halt', 'salute', 'Gintama'."

Whoa whoa, there's a 100% chance that this is something he made up just now. It's obvious just by looking at him, because none of this makes any sense. Shinpachi couldn't do anything but use the new commands. As he was preparing to shout again...

He was interrupted yet again. This time it was Katsura-kun.

"Sensei! Is there a particular reason why we're using 'Gintama' in place of 'sit down'?"

"Reason?" Ginpachi's eyebrows gave a tiny twitch. He narrowed his eyes to look at Katsura-kun. "The reason is somewhere in your student handbook! Go look it up!"

"Sensei!" Kagura-chan, who's wearing her round glasses as always, followed up. "I already traded my student handbook for toilet paper!"

"How many centimeters of toilet paper can you get from that little handbook?! Why don't you trade yourself, then? Trade yourself for toilet paper," Ginpachi said.

"Sensei!" This time it was Hijikata-kun. "I just took a peek at Okita's handbook, and he wrote my name on the blank page and then put a bunch of X marks on the back!"

⁴Students take turns being the "student on duty", who cleans up the classroom and does miscellaneous chores like watering plants, etc.

"Hey, you. You think you're Mataro⁵ or something?" Ginpachi asked Okita-kun.

"The manga you chose is so old."

Yeah, that's about enough, Shinpachi thought. Then he opened his mouth. If it continued on like this with everyone asking their stupid questions, then there would be no way for him to finish giving the commands.

"Stand up."

Hearing Shinpachi call out, the students all stood up.

"Halt. Salute. Gintama."

Shinpachi took the opportunity to finally speak the commands Ginpachi gave him all in one breath.

When all the students had sat back down, Ginpachi nonchalantly said, "Hmm... Since it wasn't as fun as I thought it would be, tomorrow we'll go back to doing it the old way."

How is it abolished so quickly?! Shinpachi thought this to himself, but didn't say anything out loud. The homeroom teacher, no, Ginpachi is always so careless.

"Hmm... Then we'll start with today's topic."

Ginpachi squinted as he spoke around his cigarette, then swiftly turned and took up a piece of chalk.

With the chalk clacking against the board, he dispassionately wrote a few words.

——Midterm Exam——

After he wrote these words on the blackboard, Ginpachi turned around to face the students.

"Ah, that's right. A test before the upcoming break. Even if it's only in one subject, you bastards had better get at least 80%. If you can't do it, starting from the week after the next, I'll turn my class into a marathon."

Eeeh--?! The class immediately burst into an uproar.

"At least." Ginpachi finished speaking, then walked out of the classroom just like that.

"Wait, wait a minute, Sensei!" Shinpachi frantically called after him. No matter how you look at it, not giving the full explanation can't be right. There's no option but to speak up now. "How can this be? We need at least 80%?"

"Yeah. If you can't do it, two weeks from now you'll all get to experience what Runner's High is like."

⁵A reference to the manga 魔太郎がくる!! (Mataro ga Kuru!!) by Fujiko Fujio, which ran from 1972-1975. Mataro, a middle school kid, uses his magic to extract horrendous revenge against the people who bullied him.

"That's not right, Sensei. Aren't you the language teacher? Why would you turn your own curriculum into a marathon!"

"Then I'll change it to... running a marathon while reciting *Man'yōshū*⁶. That should work."

"The difficulty level is even higher that way! Anyway, what's going on?"

"Sensei! I don't want to read *Man'yōshū*. Change it to *Kokin Wakashū*⁷ instead!

Facing Kondo-kun, who was loudly stating his own preferences, Shinpachi roared, "It doesn't matter what book it is! Really-- I don't want to read any of them!"

Then he turned to face Ginpachi and said, "Sensei, we won't understand unless you explain the situation clearly."

"I guess it can't be helped." Ginpachi scratched his head in defeat as he returned to the podium. "The truth is, I was called into the principle's office this morning..."

Ginpachi, who was just about to explain, stopped right there.

"Man, why do I have to explain so much? The scene will just turn into a big summary that way. Just go look at the stuff after the row of asterisks."

Hey! What do you take this novel for!

Shinpachi's screaming finally quieted down. Forget it, just go on to the flashback.

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The principal's office isn't particularly strange. In the center of the room is a couch for guests and a circular table. The principal's desk is by the windowsill.

He has an ugly, ruddy purple face with a slowly bobbing antenna sticking out from his forehead. Although he has a few sparse hairs, he still looks pretty much bald. His eyebrows are circular just like those of a high official in a play. Then combined with his eyes like persimmon seeds, his cuteness factor is zero. Beside the principal stands the glasses wearing, su---per old chief instructor, whose displeased expression seems to be hiding what he's thinking.

8:30 in the morning. After reporting to the staff room, Ginpachi was called to the principal's office.

⁶*Man'yōshū* or the "Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves" is the oldest collection of Japanese poetry - from the Nara period.

⁷*Kokin Wakashū* or the "Collected Japanese Poems of Ancient and Modern Times" is another classical text, compiled by court poets in the Heian era.

"--Gah, getting straight to the point, Sakata-sensei." Principal Hata began to speak. "The students in your class, their grades are all ve----ry poor. 'Eh, this is the test score? It's not the average age of new actors?' --Every test has these kinds of results," Principal Hata said in his slurred voice.

"I already know about these results since I'm their homeroom teacher," Ginpachi replied. He plopped onto the couch, shifting back and forth. He even had a cigarette in his mouth, taken from the pack on the table meant for guests.

"How should I say this, you don't look like you're listening to your principal."

At the principal's angry silence, the chief instructor started roaring loudly. "Sakata-sensei, please listen seriously!"

"Yeah-- I got it." Ginpachi smoothly put away the cigarettes, then got up and stood before the desk.

"This desk is so clean it looks like a robber came in and looted it... Gah, let's not talk about this right now." The principal lightly coughed twice, then continued to speak. "In short, if class Z's grades continue to fall, it would begin to influence the other classes' morale. 'It's obviously the same school, yet only that group is composed of idiots? Or should I say morons? Or should I say retards?' So that's how it is."

"Then-- Should I-- What should I do, shopkeeper?"

"It's principal. ...Gah, I think you should use harsher methods."

"...The harsher methods you're referring to... Then that means if the grades continue to fall..." Ginpachi swallowed, then choked out, "I won't have to flick their noses...will I?"

"Why are you associating that with this? Are you getting homesick?! Now that you brought it up, I really want to viciously flick you in the head. Ah, let's not talk about that." The principal slapped his desk in irritation, then started to explain. "On the upcoming midterms, even if it's only in one subject, all of the students in your class each have to get at least one result above 80%. If this isn't done, then you'll--"

"Flick their noses."

"I already said that's not it!!"

"Then...flick their foreheads."

"No. Consider it as me begging you, please listen until the end." The principal sat up straighter, then continued to say, "If this matter is not resolved, then all the students in class Z will have to attend make-up lessons on Saturdays. And also--!" The principal pointed at Ginpachi as he said, "Sakata-sensei, your wages will be reduced by 20%!"

"--! What..." Ginpachi's eyeballs looked like they were about to fall out. "A 20% cut?!" In his violent anger, he reached out a hand to grip fiercely at the principal's antenna.

"Ow ow ow! Why do you have to do this! God, it won't be a 20% cut, but 100%! My charm point will be 100% gone..."

The principal, blood overflowing from his forehead, shouted in pain. However, Ginpachi

ignored him.

"Don't joke with me! Because of that group of dumbasses, you're going to cut my wages?!"

"But that's part of your job," the principal said, taking a calming breath. "If you can't do this, class Z will become a burden on the school. It's a disgrace. As the homeroom teacher, aren't you responsible for making sure this type of situation doesn't occur?"

"..."

Ginpachi was silent. Then he gave a tiny nod and said to the principal, "Has this already been decided?"

"Yes."

"And was it you who made the decision?"

"Yes. Because I'm the principal. It's very important."

"...That's evil. Your hands are stained with blood, principal."

"No, you're the one whose hands are stained with blood, right?"

"So it doesn't matter what subject it is, as long as there's one above 80%? All right then, I'll do it. I guess I should say even if I don't want to, I have to. Classes on Saturday? A 20% pay cut?! It's not like I have much of a choice with these kinds of punishments. You've gotta be kidding me. How about we change it to not only Saturday lessons, but have class during break, too, and then cut my wages 10%? That way I won't have any complaints."

"No, no. You can't pretend as if nothing happened and fish in troubled waters. It's useless to try reducing your own punishment." The principal cast a sidelong glance at Ginpachi.

"But it's better that way, Principal." At this time, the chief instructor interrupted.

"Sakata-sensei has only grudgingly accepted this proposal, but he accepted the 'attend classes over break' idea right away. Isn't it a good idea?"

"How about it, then? Sakata-sensei." The principal gave Ginpachi an appraising glance.

"It doesn't matter. If I have to work a little more in exchange for shaving off 10% of the pay cut..."

"I won't let you walk away from this. Anyway, compared to the students, you seem to care more about your wages."

"I'm begging you here."

"I know. Then we'll do it this way. On next week's midterms, all students in class Z must each have at least one 80%. If that doesn't happen, everyone in class Z will enroll in supplementary lessons. And your wages will be reduced by 10%. All right?"

"All right. Mr. Blood."

"That's not right. I say, the one making people bleed is you," the principal said as he

cleaned the blood off his forehead with a handkerchief. His face suddenly broke out into a huge smile. "We're done here. I'll be anticipating your results."

Ginpachi did not respond to those words. He just walked out of the principal's office.

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"--And that's how it happened. Just like you saw. Above." After Ginpachi said this, he immediately turned around to leave the classroom.

"You shouldn't have said 'above', right? What's this 'above'!" Shinpachi's veins popped out as he yelled.

"Why did you have to make that kind of deal!"

Yeah, why?! Yeah! That's right, aru! I don't get it at all!

--The scolding accusations immediately sounded from all corners of the classroom.

"Anyway, Sensei, it's not right that you were only focused on reducing your own punishment!" Hijikata-kun said, and then Kondo-kun butted in as well.

"Sensei, wasn't it because of you that we have to 'have classes during break, too!'"

"That's right, aru! In my country, there's a saying that goes, 'to enroll in daily supplementary lessons is all NO! NO! NO! Yellow-green is an annoying color, yo!'"

"If this will take away even our normal vacation, I won't even have time to walk Elizabeth!"

"Also, if it's like this, then I won't be able to work and make more money! I can't hand over this vacation time when it's so important!"

You're kidding! We have to go to the principal and protest! At least overturn the last condition! This white haired guy! Natural perm! Kill the anime! ...And on and on, the students' inner thoughts got progressively more resentful. Because of what was coming those whose thoughts he previously had not known very well, Shinpachi was struck speechless for a while, but it wasn't long until--

"Shut--up--aaaah--! You little bastards!" He shouted above everyone, then cracked his neck like a thug from the countryside. "You little brats! Where do you fucking think this is, a place for injured parties to gather? You gonna wear suits, go find reporters, and whine about this at a press conference? Huh?"

With the interruption of his cold voice, the storm of condemnations finally stopped.

Ginpachi had both hands on the podium, letting out a heavy breath of secondhand smoke, and then he said, "All right, put your hands over your heart and look at yourselves. Especially the girls, put both hands on your chest and think this over."

Sensei, please stop this sexual harassment. --The female students immediately protested.

"Basically," Ginpachi continued to say, "hasn't this situation come about because your minds are so FREE that they're flying around everywhere? I'm in a worse position, having my wages cut!"

"That... Sensei," Shinpachi said conservatively, "why don't you petition the principal for lower requirements? Then have us enroll in supplementary lessons, and if we're willing to come on Saturdays..."

But before Shinpachi could finish--

"Don't even say such useless things!"

Ginpachi cut him off. He didn't know if it was some kind of psychological process, but in that instant, Shinpachi thought he saw Ginpachi's eyes flash. It was just that while he was still unsure of it, Ginpachi had already reverted to his dead fish eyes.

"All right, you guys," Ginpachi said. "It's not hopeless. All you need is one subject. 80%. Use your head for me."

It's impossible! We can't do it! Absolutely not! It's stupid to expect the impossible! ...And so on and so forth, the students responded.

"It's not impossible. I believe in you," Ginpachi said. He nodded a little, and then continued. "So... You guys are just rotten oranges! ...Ah, I said that wrong. --You guys aren't rotten oranges!"

No, that wasn't a mistake?! Otherwise isn't that the worst way he could be wrong?! Apologize, quick, apologize to Takeda Tetsuya⁸!

The thoughts that the students had been keeping in all morning suddenly burst out.

"Aaaah, you're so noisy! So noisy! So noisy! Anyway!" Ginpachi looked at his students. "After class, there will be a meeting to work out a countermeasure for the exams!"

After that, Ginpachi scratched his ass as he walked out of the classroom.

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"Whoa~ Good, good, this new development is really great," Principal Hata said. On his desk was a notebook computer with the screen showing class 3-Z's progress.

"Ah? What's great?" the chief instructor responded offhandedly as he continued to read his copy of Business Jump.

⁸Takeda Tetsuya is the actor who plays Sakamoto Kinpachi in the drama 3年B組金八先生 (3-nen B-gumi Kinpachi-sensei), of which 3-Z is a parody. Kinpachi is an inspirational teacher and a good role model. Ginpachi botches one of Kinpachi's famous quotes.

"Really, stop looking at BJ already and get over here, Head Instructor." Principal Hata adjusted the screen so that the chief instructor could see it from his standing position.

"This is security camera footage?" the chief instructor asked as he watched the broadcast of the farce in the classroom.

"Yes. This is a, this is, how do you say, a very secret monitoring device hidden inside class 3-Z."

"That's a very euphemistic way of putting it."

"It's nothing, really. It's fine as long as we're getting a picture. Also, you're not allowed to talk back to the principal."

"My apologies. Then... sorry. ...Hmm, is there something wrong with this recording?"

"And you're still asking what's wrong. Just look at it - the students of class 3-Z look so upset. And you can hear it, too, can't you? Everyone is whining and complaining," the principal said with a big smile. "Gah, to receive such bad news so early in the morning, this... It's inevitable that there would be complaints about something like this."

"Then it's great, isn't it? Really great."

The principal smiled so happily that his eyes started to shine.

So far, everything is going according to plan. The principal can't help but want to praise himself.

They all must achieve at least one 80% on the midterm exam. Otherwise the students will have to take extra lessons, and there will be a deduction in the teacher's salary, --this plan was not enacted by the principal because of some crisis caused by class 3-Z's poor performance. That is to say, he had an entirely different aim.

That bastard Ginpachi--.

The principal's feelings about this man are what started this program.

White naturally permed hair, faded glasses, and dead fish eyes. This man, Sakata Ginpachi, has no charm points at all. But for some reason, this silly man is always able to barely (gah, but really very barely) get the support of the students. If Ginpachi is there, the students will keep finding loopholes, and vice versa. 'As long as Ginpachi is there, class Z will be able to band together.' --That's the type of feeling one gets. On top of that, (according to the principal's survey) there are a few girls who also say things like, "Actually, Ginpachi-sensei doesn't look too bad sometimes."

This is what made the principal so upset.

Why is that? Why, why is it that that complete dumbass of a man can be accepted by the students? While I... While I... No matter how hard I work, I've never received even one piece of Valentine's Day chocolate; there are no love letters in my shoebox. But are there even girls who shove love letters into shoe boxes nowadays? As for his right hand man, there's only the elderly chief instructor. This situation has the 'this totally suuuucks--' feeling to it. All in all, the principal really hates Ginpachi.

Then let's make him suffer. --So that is how the current plan began.

For that group in class Z, with their brains all made of custard, to get 80% is impossible even if it's only in one subject. That means Ginpachi's salary will have to be cut. It must be a huge blow for his already meager salary to sink even lower. Just thinking about it made the principal laugh. (Gah, it's just too bad that he struck that deal to reduce the amount being cut out of his wages.)

Also, there is that--

According to the image on the monitor, it's obvious that class Z is completely uncoordinated. If they have to attend extra lessons every school day, and also on weekends, then the idiot students' idiocy levels will increase, and they'll definitely direct their hatred at Ginpachi. In that case, Ginpachi's popularity will suffer dramatically!

"I'm um, I'm ah, I might just be a genius." Ho--ho--ho~, the principal laughed.

"I say, your personality is really quite abhorrent. Such jealousy," the chief instructor mumbled with his head back behind his copy of Business Jump.

"I already warned you about talking back to me."

"(You're) such an overblown bald windbag. My apologies."

"Hey, what you just said has already overstepped the bounds of what can be considered a slip of the tongue."

"My apologies. Uh, but it seems things are going well..."

"Of course it is. My mind is that of ah, comparable to what was it...that...one... Wait a sec, it'll definitely come to me."

"I think that means you'll never remember."

"Don't you talk back to me! I'll kill you! Now I think I understand those guys who suddenly snap and want to kill people."

With this said, the over-excited principal's wound reopened and blood gushed forth from his forehead once more.

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Ginpachi trudged up to the podium, his worn slippers making dragging and shuffling sounds along the way.

It's time for the class meeting.

"Okay, uh~ Well, let's start the 'What will we do for midterms? Emergency meeting' then," Ginpachi said. He picked up a piece of chalk and held it up to the blackboard.

Tap, tap, clack. He wrote out a few columns of words.

SATISFY THESE REQUIREMENTS:
YOU MUST RECEIVE 80% OR ABOVE IN ANY ONE SUBJECT
LONG HAIR AND GANGSTERS - UNACCEPTABLE

--That's all there is."

"Sensei!" Katsura-kun immediately called out. "The second condition looks just like the requirements needed to join a band! Moreover, according to that condition, aren't I unacceptable?"

"Unacceptable, yeah. You have long~ hair," Ginpachi said. "Anyway, isn't that a wig? Whatever, just cut it off."

"Sensei, I'm really going to report you. I've already gathered all the necessary information to file a complaint."

"Sensei! If I'm better than everyone at playing the geetar, then can I join the band?" Kagura asked, messing up another word.

"You should go to the library first, and look up *guitar*. Then we'll see."

"Sensei!" This time it was Okita-kun. "A lot of musicians smash their instruments after a concert, but I'd rather smash a piggy bank."

"Ah, that's very creative," Ginpachi said.

No, it's no good... A warning signal blared in Shinpachi's mind. It's all become a mess so soon...

"Sensei! The band's lead singer should be Otae-san!" Kondo-kun added. "It's like this: she'll dress up like Koda Kumi⁹, or better yet, just show a lot of cleavage--" Before he could finish what he was saying, Otae's patience ran out and she reached out from behind him to choke him with his uniform tie. "Ah, gaaah--!" Kondo-kun groaned.

"Stop! Everyone stop!" Shinpachi was panicking.

"What is it, Shimura-otouto? You look like you have something you want to say," Ginpachi said.

"Uh, we're already completely off-topic now! What's the subject of this meeting supposed to be! Is it what we're going to do for exams? How did it change to something like, 'let's form a band!'"

"Hey, whose fault is this!" Ginpachi said indifferently.

"Ah, it's your fault! You wrote down that 'long hair and gangsters - unacceptable' line -- that's what started it all!"

"What the hell, I was just having a little fun."

⁹[Koda Kumi](#), a J-pop singer. She is known for her "ero-kakkoi" or "erotic cool-cute" style of dress.

"Is this a time to be fooling around!"

"Shinpachi-kun is right." The one who stood up and said this was, oh god, Hedoro-kun.
"Why don't we get back on track, get back on track."

Having the ferocious looking Hedoro-kun say this, Ginpachi... "I-I-I got it. I'll get back on track... get back on track."

--And so the monster nodded his head.

Thus the class re-started in the right direction.

"Uh, the important thing is," Ginpachi said as he tapped the ash off his cigarette, "that it doesn't matter what methods you use as long as you get that 80%."

It doesn't matter what methods... Ginpachi's words were full of hidden meanings.

"Then... Sensei, you're saying..." Shinpachi fearfully began to ask.

"You really have to ask?" Ginpachi smiled evilly.

"That's cheating!"

Cunning?! Cunning?! Shining?! Shaman King?!¹⁰

Even though there were two big changes in pronunciation to get there, the students still burst out with this exclamation.

Ginpachi's tone became even more evil. "Yes! Cheating, as easy as pinching a baby's hand."

"Sensei, that's child abuse!" Kagura shouted.

"Then how about I just pinch you apart," Ginpachi said.

"Hey, Sensei, if we're really cheating..."

"Let's not make this comparison anymore..." Shinpachi protested. I'm class Z's conscience, he thought to himself. But in his heart, this also carried connotations of 'compared with these total idiots, I'm the epitome of common sense', which he really couldn't approve of.

"You idiots..." Ginpachi said as he stood up. "This is a meeting to decide what we should do for the test! Think about it, isn't that just another way to say 'test preparation-cum-cheating conference'?!"

"No way, that's too weird! That 'cum' word!"

In the end--

"Shinpachi."

¹⁰Cunning (カンニング) = cheating in [wasei-eigo](#). Cunning rhymes with shining (シャイニング), which sounds somewhat similar to [Shaman King](#) (シャーマンキング) in Japanese.

He gasped in surprise. When he turned around, his older sister Otae was suddenly at his side.

"Sister..."

"Shinpachi..." Otae continued to say. For some unknown reason, her expression was one of extreme affection. "Aren't you a man? If you're a man, it wouldn't do for you to be unable to accomplish even such a tiny thing like cheating, right?"

"No, even if you put it that way, something like this isn't..."

"Are you afraid of being caught? That's not a problem at all. Write 'caught' on your palm three times and then swallow it, and then you definitely won't be caught."

"No way, that's the first time I've heard of this kind of magic spell. It's not right; is there even such a thing? This type of spell!"

"Hey, Shimura-otouto." It was Ginpachi's voice. "Now's not the time to talk about three or four or whatever! You want to enroll in supplementary lessons? Look, I'm in the same boat here - I absolutely do not want my wages cut!"

"But..."

Seeing Shinpachi's hesitancy, his classmates also started to make noise.

Shinpachi! Shinpachi-kun! Do it! Shinpachi-kun! That's right, Shinpachi-kun! Pachi-kun!

"Nonono, it's too strange! You know this is cheating, right? And it's the teacher in charge of the class who first proposed this..."

Although Shinpachi's argument was sound, his classmates' shouts of "Pachi-kun, Pachi-kun" didn't stop.

How did it end up this way, this class... Is there no one who will stand beside me...?

Shinpachi swept his gaze over the entire class, and then he stopped at Hedoro-kun's seat. Yes, there's still him. Although his appearance is terrifying, Hedoro-kun has a pure heart. He's definitely not the kind to approve of cheating... That's what Shinpachi thought, but--

"Shinpachi-kun, let's all cheat together," Hedoro-kun said ominously.

Eeee? Hedoro-kun, too...? It couldn't be, but it was, because that person was the type to put class unity and peace above all else. So that's why he switched to the cheaters' side... b-but is that really it?! Aaaaah! I don't understand any of this!

Shinpachi's mind was in chaos.

"Then it's decided! On to the next topic!" Ginpachi seized this opportunity to firmly shut down the opposition.

"But cheating is wrong. If we were to do something like that..."

"Haven't you had enough--!" Ginpachi's temper exploded and he roared in anger. "Then

we'll do it this way! If you go along, 'This year's cultural festival will feature a special guest performer, the idol Terakado Tsuu!' I'll make this proposal at the next staff conference! What, now you have nothing to say?!"

Terakado... Tsuu...

A fierce, bright light suddenly flashed forth from the body of Shimura Shinpachi, captain of Terakado Tsuu's Imperial Guards.

"How could there be anything else?! Hey, you bastards! Come up with some foolproof cheating methods right noooooooooowww!!"

It took less than a second for him to have a change of heart.

"Now then, it's decided that we'll cheat." Ginpachi put a fresh cigarette in his mouth. "So you guys have any good ideas?"

The students responded to their teacher's inquiry with confused faces, each drifting away deep in thought.

Cheating. It was actually quite difficult to find good ways to accomplish such a thing.

Certainly, the act of cheating itself may be simple. For example, writing the answers on something like a pencil case or an eraser beforehand, or perhaps secretly exchanging information with a neighbor. These are some of the classic techniques that have existed since ancient times.

But it was different this time, because they were working under the condition that "each member of the class must achieve a high score". There has never been a "make sure it's not just you that gets a good grade, but everyone else, too" method for cheating. It would be impossible to carry out a plan like this without a way to allow the whole class to have access to a shared pool of information.

After a short while, Hijikata-kun raised his hand. "Sensei, I have an idea."

"Go ahead."

Having been given permission from Ginpachi, Hijikata-kun began to explain. "It's the mayonnaise method. You use mayonnaise to write the answers on the blackboard, and then wipe it off *before* the start of the test. If it's done this way, when the time comes to take the test, there will be an oily residue when the light reflects on it from a certain angle. And this way we'll be able to see the words that had previously been there..."

"Any other ideas--? Anything else." Ginpachi purposely looked away from Hijikata-kun.

"It's already been rejected?! Can't we at least discuss it a little?!"

"You're an idiot! No one wants to use a method that's only feasible in Mayonnaise Kingdom!"

Hijikata-kun was still unconvinced, but quieted down. Then Okita-kun stood up.

"Sensei! What about this plan?"

"Go ahead."

"We beat the proctor until he faints from blunt force trauma, or knock him out with chloroform--"

"Any other ideas--? Anything else."

"Let's do it this way! Sensei!" This time it was Kondo-kun. "What do you think of this? Everyone goes to sign language school to learn sign language, and then we use sign language to exchange answers--"

"Any other ideas--? Anything else."

"Sensei!" Kagura stood up. She sounded like she had thought this over quite a bit. "I have a great plan, aru!"

"Aru aru? ...Ah, never mind. Go ahead."

"It looks like it will be very difficult to win the battle with only the strength of this class, aru! So why don't we borrow some outside forces?"

"Oh..." Ginpachi was very interested. "We've finally got a decent proposal, huh? Well, how are we going to do that?"

"Wahaha!" Kagura-chan laughed and started to happily explain her idea. "This school actually has dogs like Sadaharu, aru. We can just use Sadaharu."

This Sadaharu that Kagura-chan spoke of was one of those stray puppies that just about any school had hanging around. No one knew for sure when he had wandered over to Gintama High School, or when he had started to live here -- that was Sadaharu. For some reason, he was especially close to Kagura-chan, and it was Kagura-chan who named him "Sadaharu". He was a complete mystery, this Sadaharu. Especially things like why his body was big enough to rival a brown bear, or why he kept biting people in the head, that bastard...

"Oh, that dog, huh. And how are we going to use him?" Ginpachi asked.

"We'll just let Sadaharu bark from the courtyard, aru. Woof means the answer is A, and woof woof means the answer is B, and so on."

"So that's it..." Ginpachi said with a sigh. "Right--, so this dog--, letting him bark--, like that--, but then-- Doesn't there have to be someone there to tell him the answers? Can that dog even learn a trick like that? Who will teach it? Think about what you're saying, China-girl!"

"Did you understand! You stupid China-girl!!" Kagura suddenly seized Shinpachi by the chest.

"No way, he's talking about you! Whether it's the 'China' part or the 'girl' part of it, the only one who fits the criteria is you!!" Shinpachi had been shaken until his glasses nearly fell off.

"You guys, please don't tell me you really have frozen custard for brains? Can't you even

come up with a halfway decent plan?!" Ginpachi said anxiously. "For example, Shimura Tae. Ah, you go ahead and entertain two or three teachers with your body--"

Ginpachi hadn't yet finished speaking when Otae found something in the corner that she could launch.

That supersonic projectile-- grazed past Ginpachi's cheek and buried itself in the blackboard. *Clack!*

"Ah ah ah, Sensei, you're too much. I won't miss next time," Otae threatened with a smile.

"Uh...that...sorry. ...I seem to have brought up something inappropriate...geh...that...I'm very sorry." Ginpachi's expression was very stiff as he said this.

At this time, Shinpachi suddenly realized something. Wait a minute... In focusing solely on finding ways to cheat, they had forgotten one key point.

"Um, may I say something?" Shinpachi stood up with those words.

"What the hell, straight man," the homeroom teacher said.

"Don't refer to me by my role! Use my name, my name!" After his violent outburst, Shinpachi continued on. "Anyway, I've thought carefully about this, and I realized that we're forgetting something important.."

"What is it, what is it? Did you suddenly get famous? Four-eyed background character straight man-kun," Kagura-chan said.

"I'm a background character? Did you just call me a background character?!" Although he wanted to challenge the Chinese girl's statement, it was best to endure it for now, and so he continued. "For starters, cheating is knowing the answers beforehand, or secretly looking at something during the test, right? Uh, for example, take the math formulas, periodic table, or English grammar rules and write them down somewhere, and then use that when we're taking the test. While we can cheat this way, this time everyone has to get above 80%. If that's so, then the second method alone isn't enough. What I mean is, we need to get the answer key for the exam, but how would we do that? I think that if we don't figure out how to get the answers first and only talk about how to distribute what we don't have, then it's useless..."

When Shinpachi finished, Ginpachi and the other students were completely silent. As if a tiny machine were struggling to process a colossal file, such a silence continued on for some time.

Finally, Ginpachi opened his mouth. "So, Shinpachi-kun, to put it simply, your point was that if we're going to cheat, we need to get a hold of the answer key first."

"Yes."

"Uh--, and then we'll have to decide which subject to cheat on before that?"

"Of course."

"Eh, right, of course..." A weak smile appeared on Ginpachi's face as he said this. "Answer key... That kind of thing isn't easy to obtain--."

"Ginpachi-sensei, aren't you writing one of the tests? If Sensei is giving us the language exam, the problem is solved."

"Eh...the ones putting out the exams, there are other... How do you say, it's something that those without idiots or straight men... it's something that the normal teachers do."

"Sensei, you just admitted that you're not a normal teacher..."

Ginpachi had no reply to Shinpachi's accusation.

There was silence for a long time, until Ginpachi decided to speak once more. "--Anyway, what are you saying... Shinpachi-kun. ...We're unable to cheat... is that it?"

"Yeah--" Shinpachi said. With his hands on his chin, he raised his head to look up at the ceiling. "...Ah, even though I had to say a lot to get to this point... I guess that's the final conclusion."

"We can't do it this way--, it's like this, huh--, if we don't know what's on the test, then--, that means-- ...Hey! What are you smiling at, you bastard!"

Ginpachi suddenly threw his chalk. The two pieces of chalk, one white and one yellow, lodged themselves into Shinpachi's nostrils, sticking out like the rabbit ears antenna of an old TV set.

"What are we going to do--! What are we going to do--!" Ginpachi shouted. "I'd already prepared to cheat... No no, it's that I wanted wholeheartedly to succeed! This is simply, ah, that... You know, it's like when you think you really want to eat curry rice today so you go to the curry restaurant, but it's closed. 'Oooh, but my mouth has already turned into a curry mouth!' --That...is the same feeling of disappointment--! Come to think of it, what is a curry mouth!"

Shinpachi pulled the chalk out of his nose and roared, "How the hell would I know--!"

In light of this, their plans to cheat vanished into thin air. Having had the facts smashed into their faces, the students of class Z immediately got together to make Shinpachi their punching bag.

Stop joking, you four-eyed frog! You destroyed our dream! Hey, why are you blaming me! Shut up! Background character! B-b-b-b-background character?! Who? Who just called me a background character?!

Just like this, class Z began to fight again.

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"Hmph. How in the world did you think you could pull off cheating with those brains of yours--?" the principal smugly said as he watched the screen.

"So they were really thinking of cheating." The chief instructor was reading Akamaru Jump

as he said this.

"Aaah, it's just as I expected. But anyway...why is it that the Jump you usually read isn't Weekly Shonen Jump..."

"Jump is Jump."

"Ah...never mind."

The principal turned his attention back to the performance before him. Class Z had once again turned into a chaotic mass. Good, good. Like fights breaking out in Parliament or in baseball stands, such violent scenes made for great entertainment.

Using their puny IQs to cheat? Impossible. As long as Ginpachi was not given the task of writing one of the exams, there was no way they could cheat their way to 80%--.

"Come, class 3-Z, let's see how you'll deal with this, hm? Ohohoho!" Laughter echoed throughout the room.

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"Right now it's..." Shinpachi said. "I think the only option we have left is to study. We still have a week."

Shinpachi honestly felt that this was the only route they could take. In the end, the whole class conspiring together with the homeroom teacher to cheat on the exams just wasn't right. It wasn't, how do you say, the way of the samurai. ...No, that's not it. It has nothing to do with actual samurai. It's just a metaphor, just a metaphor.

"Eeeeh, studying?" Ginpachi said with disbelief. "Where's the fun in that? ...You bastards are all custard brains--!"

But Shinpachi could not be discouraged. "Yes, that's true, but all we can do now is study. Study hard, and get that 80% the honest way."

"Shinpachi-kun, honesty sounds like a good idea--. I agree with you," Catherine said.

Aaah, finally there was someone who agreed. With this thought, Shinpachi looked over at Catherine with grateful tears in his eyes, that cat-eared girl who was scribbling math formulas and grammar rules on her arms at breakneck speed.

"Who do you think you are, the bassist in a heavy metal band?! --And how come even I don't have a proper comeback for this situation when I'm the straight man aaaaah!"

In a fit of rage, Shinpachi grabbed a nearby eraser and chucked it, though Catherine effortlessly dodged out of the way.

"As. I. Was. Saying!" Shinpachi slammed his hand down on his desk. "Forget about cheating! Study! Let's study!"

"Yeah, but Shimura," Hijikata-kun said, "if we're going to study, what are we studying? Even if we're not cheating, I still think it would be better to focus on just one subject."

"Good point." Shinpachi nodded. It was obviously not a good idea for students in their condition to study all the subjects equally. Because the class is full of idiots, yeah, and brain space is very limited. "Then, which subject would be best?"

Kagura-chan's hand shot up as soon as Shinpachi finished asking his question. "Digging for yams!"

"That's not a class!" Ginpachi shouted.

"Gossip!" This was Okita-kun's opinion.

"Like I said, that's not a class! At least pick a proper subject, you bastards."

"Health class. Let's do sex ed."

"That's not going to be on the exam! And also, isn't this already your specialty, Shimura Tae. Ah...sorry, but don't just blurt out that kind of stuff!"

"How about we calculate how much you can get from unemployment insurance?" Hasegawa-kun asked.

"Why, do you work for the government?! But if you really could calculate that, it'd be pretty amazing, in a way."

"Everyone stop! Enough is enough!" Kondo-kun stood up with a roar. "This isn't something we should joke about! Be serious! Sensei, what do you think of rhythmic gymnastics?"

"I'm being absolutely serious when I say I want to kill you. ...And anyway, even though this is Japan, that kind of thing doesn't exist! ...Probably."¹¹

"...How about English, then." Shinpachi thought it was about time to intervene. "I think that we'll be able to do better if it's English. Actually, I have some information about that."

"Information?" Ginpachi narrowed his eyes in suspicion.

Shinpachi nodded. "None of you know about this? I heard that the English exam will have three 'usage questions' based on what we've done in our workbooks during class. If we can memorize those examples, then that's guaranteed to be about 20 points right there."

English, huh... Class Z fell into deep contemplation. Finally--

"My English sucks," Catherine said.

¹¹Oh, but it does... Rhythmic gymnastics is a sport where the participants perform a choreographed floor routine as a group. Although it's usually done by women, there's a new men's version being pioneered by Japan, which is probably what's being referring to here. (The Gintama cast should do this. [No, really.](#))

"Whoa! That's really weird," Shinpachi said. "No matter how I look at it, shouldn't someone with a face like yours be very good in English?! ...And your name's Catherine!"

"That's not it. It's because I only speak the *Queen's English*..."¹²

"Do you understand the words that are coming out of your mouth?! That is the *Queen's English*!"

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHH!!!

He was about to rip out his hair. Shinpachi yelled in frustration, "All the other subjects are even worse than English! Because at least we know what 20% of the English test is going to be!! As for the remaining 60%, if you think of studying as a do or die mission, it shouldn't be impossible!!"

Yeah, but--. Even if you put it that way--. ...His classmates continued to mutter their complaints.

Then Ginpachi spoke up. "Complain all you want, but there's no other way. Shinpachi, we'll go with your plan. From now until the test, we'll study English every day after school."

Sensei... It was very moving. While Shinpachi was moved in a... "isn't it strange that he's doing all this to avoid extra lessons during break" sort of way, it really was a very powerful feeling. This man, although 98% of him is "oh, that's bad, that really won't do", there was still that leftover 2% that was "warmhearted"... That was what he thought when he looked at Ginpachi.

"All right, you bastards. After all, we can't cheat anymore." Ginpachi drew the matter to a close. "For the English midterm, study with all you've got! --You have no choice but to get that 80%. Otherwise, I'll turn my class into... doing gymnastics vaults while reciting *Hinkyū Mondōka*¹³."

"It's exactly the same as this morning!" --It wasn't known who suddenly decided to play the straight man. Whatever, it was fine since class Z finally had a plan.

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"Wow, that's bad. Look at that atmosphere; they've unexpectedly become united." The chief instructor stole a glance at the monitor, a thick volume of Jump draped over his shoulder.

"This time it's Weekly Jump, huh... No matter, I still have another plan," the principal said as he continued to watch the monitoring device's screen. Yes, another plan...

¹²English words in italics = originally already in English.

¹³*Hinkyū Mondōka*, "Dialogue on Poverty". A poem by Yamanoue no Okura, one of the contributors to *Man'yōshū*.

So they actually managed to pull off that "let's unite" crap! Humph. Well there's no way I'll let you continue immersing yourselves in this "Ah! It's the springtime of youth!" atmosphere, bastard Ginpachi...

[to be continued]

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'What will we do for midterms? Emergency meeting' day two.

This is the start of their after-school study sessions.

Subject: English. Although their first task is only to memorize and recite examples from the workbook, the students are completely absorbed in their studies.

"*No...batter...than...* ...To do something just as bad... *No batter than...* To do something just as bad... J-just...as bad..." This was Kondo-kun repeatedly reciting a complex phrase. Then he suddenly started coughing up blood. "Uwaaah...! I-it's no good! It's impossible for me... To think I'd actually die this way..."

"I forbid you from saying this kind of useless thing!!" Ginpachi roared. It was a mystery as to why he was wearing workout clothes and holding a bamboo sword. "It's not as if anyone expects you to be fluent! All you have to do is get to the level where you can answer the questions, isn't that right! Good, now get up!"

After Ginpachi beat him with the bamboo sword for a while, Kondo-kun finally managed to slowly pull himself up.

"...Hmm... Turns out that I'm useless at the sort of English used on this test..."

"Shut up, **Catherine**! Hurry up and study for your *Japanese* English test!!" Ginpachi pounded the floor with his bamboo sword.

"So... *Mick* used a length of hemp rope to tie up *Nancy*, and in his hands is a leather whip..."

"Okita!! It's not that kind of textbook, is it--?!"

"*A...up. B...book. C...get.*"

"We're doing high school level English, China-girl!!"

"*Ara you happy?*"

"This has nothing to do with Yuu-chan, Hasegawa!¹⁴ And you need to speak more clearly,

¹⁴Ginpachi yells at Hasegawa for reading off-topic materials by pretending to misunderstand him as asking if "Yuu" is happy. It's a pun based on the fact that the name Yuu (永) has the

Shinpachi!" Ginpachi viciously smacked Shinpachi in the back with the bamboo sword.

"Ow! Wait, are you punishing me for following directions? Some teacher you are!"

"Shut up! It's all because you guys never studied seriously that things have gotten this way!" But regardless of what angry abuses Ginpachi hurled at them, the students in class Z, who had never studied seriously, were still idiots to the core.

However, as they continued on with the study session, the idiot moments appeared less and less frequently. Because there was no other way, the students attacked the workbook with all their might.

Do your best, everyone. Shinpachi mentally cheered on his classmates. We may be tired, but I've always thought...how do you say... It's the springtime of youth!

Shinpachi couldn't help but let out a little chuckle, at which Ginpachi shouted, "Don't you dare start laughing all by yourself!" and beat the crap out of him.

And so they arrived at the third day of studying--

It was already no longer a situation in which one could say, 'Ah, the springtime of youth!'

The students of class Z, who were originally allergic to studying, had been at it nonstop for three days, and their health had dropped into the danger zone.

Bags and dark circles under every eye, faces so emaciated that just a glance was enough for onlookers to feel ashamed of themselves, and that wasn't even the worst of it. Katsura-kun was foaming at the mouth, Kagura-chan was suffering from auditory hallucinations, and Hasegawa-kun had gotten to the point where he was exhibiting strange behaviors such as gnawing on his own sunglasses. Kondo-kun had already been coughing up blood by the first day; by the third day, it had become a deadly combination of bloody cough + bloody vomit + blood spurting out everywhere. But because they were so fatigued, you couldn't pick out who in class Z was among those (very few) who were still somewhat healthy.

"Ah, what am I going to do with you guys--" Ginpachi said. He looked at the groggy students one by one. "If this keeps up, we'll be needing a lot of body bags by the time exams roll around... --Health care committee member!"

"You mean me, Sensei?"

The one who replied was a female student - the one with glasses and long hair draped across her shoulders like a shawl. She was quite the beauty. Her name was Sarutobi Ayame, called "Sa-chan".

"Health care committee member, I hereby command you to provide first aid. Energize these bastards--!"

Having been commanded this way by Ginpachi, Sa-chan blushed and gave a small nod, and then began surveying the classroom.

same pronunciation as the English "you".

Right away, Kondo-kun entered her line of sight. Sa-chan moved toward his seat. "Looks like you're the one with the most serious condition," she said with poison dripping from her words.

"Ah, uh, it's me...?" Kondo-kun's voice was shaking.

"Yes, it's you. That's why I'm going to start now, helping you get...energized," Sa-chan said, searching within her left sleeve.

In the next instant, Sa-chan was holding in her right hand a needle approximately 30 centimeters long.

"Acupuncture therapy," she explained. Sa-chan's face was expressionless as she said this. "Now then, where's the place that will make you feel energetic, hmm...?"

"Hey, what do you mean, 'where'...? If you're not sure, then it's better to just forget about the treatment..."

Although Kondo-kun resisted according to his survival instincts, he was no match for his opponent. His head was pressed down on top of the desk; his pants and underwear pulled down.

"It's probably around here," Sa-chan said while adjusting the needle.

"W-w-wait, don't do it... Don't do it, please stop, don'tdoitstopdon'tdoitstaaaaaahh--!!" As the echoes of that painful wail died down-- Kondo-kun left this world.

You know, Sa-chan, enemas and acupuncture are two different things...

But having had to endure watching that painful scene, even Shinpachi bit back his comments.

"All right, all right! Look alive, you guys!" Ginpachi pounded the podium and said, "Otherwise the health care committee member will have to give you energizing treatments--!"

Shyly, Sa-chan said to Ginpachi, "Then, Sakata-sensei, I'll be in your care after school. Will you help me get...energized...please?"

"Hey, what kind of favor is that? And anyway, like hell I'd want to do that--!" Gintoki said, his face twitching.

After something like that happened, to put it simply--

With support and encouragement like that (like bondage and coercion and that kind of stuff) coming from that failure of a teacher and the S&M health care committee member, everyone in class Z continued going down into that lion's den known as a 'study session'.

They had to memorize the workbook. Aside from that, they could only count on their own hard work for the rest. For class Z, this was a task as difficult as hopping like a rabbit up the side of the Tower of Babel while dead drunk. However, they had promised to study hard for the entire week, so even though they were tattered and bruised all over, they fought until the very end. And then--

The day of the test finally arrived.

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--Hey, the questions on this test are way off!

It's the day of the test. Looking down at the test that had just been handed to him, Shinpachi felt as if his insides were going to explode.

Eeeeeh?! No way, no way! What the hell is this? Huh, that's strange, because the book... We spent all that time and effort on that, and it was all for nothing?!

And that had been the only thing they anticipated being on the test.

Since Shinpachi knew he had to get at least 60 points on his own, he had been studying hard every day this week. He had translated the entire textbook into Japanese, memorized all the vocabulary words in the glossary at the back, gone over the main points and compound words... He'd done more than that, even. Anything and everything that could have been on the test, he had gotten down. Except...

The test in his hands right now was comprised solely of ultra-difficult questions that had nothing to do with any of that.

It's all just a parade of unknown words and unknown phrases. Their textbook was like, *Nancy, Mick, and Bob* have bumped into a bit of *trouble* at the airport, and went on to explain how they solved their problem, but the reading passage on the test had *Alec, Vincent, and Grey* having a super-profound, ultra-deep conversation on environmental protection policies! *Fuck you!!*

C-can't understand any of it... The blood drained from Shinpachi's face. Drop by drop, beads of cold sweat began appearing on his brow.

Suddenly, a snap sounded off from the left. Surreptitiously glancing over, Shinpachi saw Kondo-kun glaring back this way with his face contorted in extreme anger. Another snapping sound, and the mechanical pencil in his hand broke in half.

What the hell's going on, you bastard! How come none of the things we studied are on the test--?! That was what Kondo-kun's look was saying.

Then snapping sounds started coming from all corners of the room, all exactly alike. Snap, snap, snap, they reverberated all around.

They were all the sounds of mechanical pencils breaking in half. Each snap was accompanied by a look of murderous rage directed at Shinpachi. They were all saying, "Bastard, it's completely different from what you said it would be!"

E-even if you all blame me, it won't be of any use! Shinpachi started crying. I might have been wrong, but there was no way to know that the test would be so hard! And all the English tests in the past have been based on things we've done in the book! Shit! The

tears won't stop--!!

...But crying was no use, either. He still had no idea how to do this; no idea how to get through this test.

There was only one thing he could understand, and it was this: it's impossible for everyone to get above 80% on this test.

Leaning against the wall in the corner of the room was the proctor for this exam, Ginpachi.

Ginpachi had a cigarette in his mouth. He kept his dead fish eyes focused on the horizontal scroll above the blackboard -- "sugar level".

"..."

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Our country in ruins, all things have withered.
Receiving no honors, only a thousand dry bones.
Mountains groan, aaaah man is this long-winded or what.

Midterm exams have finally ended at Gintama High School, and grades have all been sent in.

Well, what about class Z's scores, what about those, huh... Just forget about that; they suck. Not a single one of them had gotten a test back with 80% or above.

But that's to be expected. It's only natural that things turn out this way. After all, they spent all their energy studying English, but it was the English test that turned out to be unreasonably hard...

"I've decided, aru!" Kagura-chan suddenly said. They were having a class meeting before going home. Kagura-chan's proclamation was like a giant gong sounding off during their darkest hour, but nevertheless, she ignored the atmosphere and happily continued on, saying, "I've decided that I will trade the English textbook for toilet paper, aru!"

"You're really happy, huh. Actually this happy over toilet paper," Ginpachi coldly said.

"But!" came Kondo-kun's loud voice, "If the test doesn't have any questions like those in the workbook assignments, then the workbook doesn't deserve to be called a workbook! It's more like a 'Hello Friends, if You Like English, Feel Free to Have a Look *Book*', isn't it--!"

"Hey Kondo, We're All Fed Up Already, so Please Stop Shouting *Book*," Ginpachi said.

"That sentence had nothing to do with '*book*'. What the hell, and you still tacked it on!"

Because the atmosphere in the class was so gloomy, there was no response to Kondo-kun's comeback.

And it wasn't as if they were sad without reason. Not only did everyone have to enroll in

supplementary lessons, but Ginpachi also had his wages cut by 10%.

"Everyone, I'm sorry!" Shinpachi stood up with great determination. "It's all my fault. It's all because I made us pick English...and the thing with the workbook was my idea, too... I'm so sorry!"

The classroom was silent.

A short while later, Ginpachi slowly began to speak. "Shinpachi, lift up your head." His voice was full of gentleness.

"Sensei..."

"There wasn't anything you could have done. Everyone already tried their best. Even though the result wasn't what we wanted, it's okay. At any rate, at least we showed solidarity and worked together toward our goal. Of course I'd still be happy with you guys."

"S-sensei..." Damn it! If this keeps up, the tears won't stop--!

"However, Shinpachi," Ginpachi said with a smile. "--IT'S STILL YOUR FAULT YOU BASTARD!!!!"

Ginpachi had completely changed in an instant.

Teach him a lesson!! At Ginpachi's signal, the whole class advanced upon Shinpachi like an avalanche.

You're as good as dead, bastard!! You said you had information!! It was all wrong! There wasn't even one question on what we studied!! Go and die, you stupid thing!! Just like that, one by one they came upon Shinpachi with their fists. Feet. Knives. Fire extinguishers.

"Wait, wait a sec!" Shinpachi shouted from the center of the violence. "Just--? Just now--? Just now, that 'at least we showed solidarity and worked together toward our goal', did you guys even hear that--?!"

At that moment, the front door of the classroom slid open.

"Ho--ho-ho..."

Along with this shrill laughter came Principal Hata and the chief instructor.

"Oh, my, my... So sorry to disturb you at the greatest instance of violence this campus has ever seen," the principal said as he stepped up to the podium beside Ginpachi.

The circle of violence that surrounded Shinpachi temporarily dispersed, with everyone returning to their seats for the time being.

"Is something the matter?" Ginpachi asked. His face was completely expressionless.

"It's nothing, nothing at all. I just thought I should pop in to see the looks on your kicked-puppy faces."

As soon as they heard those words, the students of class Z all felt their hearts flare up with

murderous intent.

What the principal said next was even worse. "Now then, you homeless dogs of students, are we all clear about the situation? Starting from today, you will have supplementary lessons after school, and you will also have lessons on Saturday. And Sakata-sensei will have his wages reduced by 10%. Don't forget these two conditions, okay.

"About that, principal," Ginpachi said. The cigarette in his mouth was puffing out clouds of smoke while he addressed the principal. "There's just something I can't understand about all of this."

"What is it?" The principal didn't bother to hide his look of disgust at the smoke as he glanced back at Ginpachi.

"The idiots in my class placed all their bets on the English test this time around. But how could this happen? The topic was so random it was something they could only come up with in La Salle. The chances of that happening are outrageously low."

"Hohoho..." The principal suddenly stopped laughing. "No, no, this is Gintama High School, not La Salle High School, and not Nada High School."¹⁵

"And that's why I don't get it. Why is this the only time the test has been so difficult? That's what I can't figure out."

Ginpachi's tone had never sounded so serious before. Unconsciously, the atmosphere in the class became tense.

"Hohoho... This...is because you... Well it is what it is, isn't it? The difficulty level of the test, such a thing... Sometimes it has to be adjusted according to the situation..."

"...'Adjusted according to the situation'?" Ginpachi pushed up his falling glasses. "So it was you pulling the strings? You purposely made the teachers writing the exams pick difficult topics."

"You have no proof to back up your accusations," the principal said. His purple head flushed red. "Moreover, we couldn't possibly have known that you would focus solely on English. Isn't that right, chief instructor?"

"That's right, uh, that's right."

"'Couldn't possibly have known'...is it? ...You still dare to say that."

Ginpachi spoke in a soft voice, but his fists were clenched tightly. Seeing him like this, the principal couldn't help but start shaking.

"Um, um... You...cannot use v-v-v-violence..."

"Sensei! You can't do this!" With this shout, Shinpachi stood up. True, he was also angry at the principal. But violence was not the answer. If they hit the principal, it would mean

¹⁵There are two La Salle High Schools in Hakodate and Kagoshima, respectively. Nada High School is a high-ranked private school in Kobe. My guess is that these schools are well-known for high academic performance.

that they had lost.

However, Shinpachi was just a tad bit late. Ginpachi had already swung his fist.

"Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh--!"

A powerful punch-- changed course at the tip of the principal's nose and struck the blackboard.

Ka-pow! --The principal and chief instructor fearfully shut their eyes at the sound.

And then--

The horizontal scroll above the blackboard came tumbling down. Crash! Smash! Glass shattered all over the wooden floorboards.

Ginpachi's face said, "whoops", but his mouth said, "So, Principal. What's up with this camera--?"

Because of what Ginpachi said, all eyes shifted over there, to the place above the blackboard where the scroll had hung.

"Aaaah--!" Shinpachi couldn't stop himself from screaming.

There was a hole, from which the monitoring device's lens extended out.

"Ah...that... That is..." the principal stuttered.

So that's how... Shinpachi finally understood. It's because he was spying on us... That's how the principal knew we'd decided to go for the English test... Anger began flaring up in Shinpachi's chest.

"I've already been spied on by this monitoring device, and now I won't be able to get married, aru--!" Kagura-chan's pitiful wailing was ignored by everybody.

But... Wait a minute. The camera's lens was covered by the scroll, so it couldn't have gotten anything. As if anticipating Shinpachi's thought processes, Ginpachi started speaking.

"You play dirty. You were spying on us from a tiny hole in the scroll right in the middle of the 'rice' radical in the character for 'sugar'." ¹⁶

Ginpachi's words didn't quite count as proof, but it was a good enough explanation. There was a hole in the horizontal scroll. The camera lens was positioned right at that hole in order to observe the situation in class Z... That's what happened.

"Should we file a complaint to the PTA or the board of education over this?"

¹⁶ 糖 = sugar
米 = rice

...And now you know why the scene dividers are all ※, a type of asterisk known as the "East Asian reference mark"... or the "rice mark". Hohoho! Oh, Gintama... You so clever...

"Uh...a complaint isn't necessary...for this kind of thing." The principal had just finished speaking when Ginpachi poked him with a finger. "Uh... But you don't have any proof that we were the ones who installed the monitoring device."

"I have proof." Ginpachi spat the words out along with a puff of smoke. "You bastard, you have the worst personality in the whole world."

"Hmph. What does this have to do with anything? You don't have any evidence; therefore, I win. Since I'm so awesome, the board of education will definitely believe me over you."

"Sonuvabitch..." Slowly, Ginpachi closed the distance to the principal.

He's going to get flattened this time-- Shinpachi couldn't help but let out a gasp.

"You can stop now," someone said from the back of the class.

Everyone turned to the source of that voice. Leaning against the back wall, nonchalantly blowing out cigarette smoke, was-- Gintama High School's headmistress, Otose. Original name, Terada Ayano. About 50-something years old, wears black clothes... The Queen of the Night. ...No, no, the mother of this academy.

"Headmistress..." The principal's voice was weak and wavering.

"Principal, you have acted shamefully. About the matter of you calling the English teachers to your office and telling them to increase the difficulty of the test--" The headmistress took out a tape from within her sleeve. "It's all been recorded."

"It can't be!" The principal took a step back in surprise. "How did this happen? A hidden microphone? ...Headmistress, did you install bugs in my office?!"

"Sorry about that, but your conversation with the English teachers is all right here. There's no way to deny it."

The principal was struck speechless.

The headmistress calmly said, "Ginpachi. The principal, he is upset that an unenthusiastic person such as you was able to obtain the students' favor. That's why he planned this."

"Che! What a petty man." Ginpachi shot the principal a look and scoffed at him.

"But I... But I..." The principal was near tears.

"So," the headmistress said, letting out another puff of smoke. "Let's put an end to this quarrel. Class Z's extra lessons and Ginpachi's pay cut are canceled. Ginpachi, you also didn't do your best to prevent this from happening. It's fine to just let it go like this."

Ginpachi sighed and nodded. "If Headmistress says so, then I'll comply." Then he said to the principal, "You heard her. Cancel the extra lessons, and then give me a 10% raise."

"No one said to give you a raise!" The headmistress, standing to the side, raised her voice in a way that would give anyone the shivers.

"I-I-I... I understand." The principal, his voice having become very small, nodded in

assent.

"Well, you've lost." The chief instructor placed his hand on the principal's shoulder and spoke in a very refreshed manner.

The devastated principal, and the chief instructor who was comforting him. The two of them walked out of class Z.

How do you say, it's like this-- Never mind how the saying goes, the crisis is finally over.

Shinpachi let out a long breath, looked around the class, and discovered that everyone's faces showed relief. And Ginpachi was facing blackboard where he had smashed a hole.

Sensei... You might be a total mess of a teacher, but...that...how do you say...just now, you looked kind of cool... That was what Shinpachi thought. It was just a thought, and yet Shinpachi found himself blushing. He could never say those kinds of things out loud.

Just then, the headmistress let out a heavy sigh. "Well, I'll be on my way," she said, preparing to leave the classroom.

"Headmistress."

"What is it?" Although she had stopped, the headmistress did not turn her head back.

Still, Ginpachi said, "You've been a big help. You always make an appearance at the very end. I thought for a moment that you wouldn't show up during the first chapter."

The headmistress chuckled, and pointed at the wreckage from the fallen scroll; at the broken glass and smashed wooden frame, and said, "You better remember to clean that up."

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The next day.

"Principal."

"W-what is it. What happened yesterday is already..."

"That's not it. I'm not here to dig up past transgressions."

"T-then what are you here for...?"

"Yeah, that, how do you say..." Lowering his voice, Ginpachi continued and said, "The footage from that surveillance camera... Did you get any shots of the girls changing?"

"..." The principal had nothing to say.

"You know, you're really not suited for being a teacher," the chief instructor mumbled.

Under his arm was a copy of V Jump¹⁷.

[end]

¹⁷V Jump focuses on manga based on video games, hence the V.